

## Mark(et)ing Expertise: the Goldsmith-engraver in the Low Countries and the Use of House Marks

Oliver Kik

In 1489, the Nuremberg-based goldsmith Hans Schmuttermayer (act. 1484–1520) published his *Fialenbüchlein*.<sup>1</sup> It was a small instruction manual, intended for his fellow craftsmen, on how to draw and design a gothic pinnacle starting from a geometrical ground plan and based on Euclidean rules of thumb. By using a simple geometrical figure (such as a square or a triangle), it was possible to deduce from the ground plan the widths and lengths of the entire structure. This followed a long tradition of similar model- and instruction books, of which the earliest known example is the 13th-century portfolio of Villard de Honnecourt (c.1230).<sup>2</sup> What differentiated Schmuttermayer's manual from its predecessors was the fact that it included two engravings, one showing a gothic pinnacle and the other an arch (Fig. 1.1). Schmuttermayer published the booklet himself and most likely provided the copperplates required for the engravings. Although he is not generally considered an engraver, Schmuttermayer is a modest representative of a late 15th-century phenomenon of goldsmiths disseminating their technical skills and knowledge via the new medium of engraved images.

The close connection between goldsmiths' workshops and the origins of the engraved image is a well-studied phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> By the middle of the

1 Lon Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques: The Fifteenth-Century Design Booklets of Mathes Roriczer and Hanns Schmuttermayer* (Carbondale: 1977), 28–31.

2 Carl F. Barnes Jr., *The Portfolio of Villard de Honnecourt (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Fr 19093): A New Critical Edition and Color Facsimile* (Farnham: 2009).

3 Max Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog des deutschen, niederländischen un französischen Kupferstichs in xv. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1 (Vienna: 1908), 1–3; David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470–1550* (New Haven and London: 1994), 7–8; Joyce G. H. Zelen, "Zum Verhältnis des frühen Kupferstichs zur Goldschmiedekunst: der Salzburger Hausaltar des Meisters Perchtold" in: *Mit den Gezeiten. Frühe Druckgraphik der Niederlande*, ed. Tobias Pfeifer-Helke (Petersberg: 2013), 25–31; Ad Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching 1400–2000. A History of the Development of Manual Printmaking Processes* (Houten: 2012), 30–33, situates the beginning of printmaking with the Master of the Playing Cards, c.1435. He does notice, however, that the hatchings made by early engravers are of a different nature than those seen in goldsmiths' engravings.

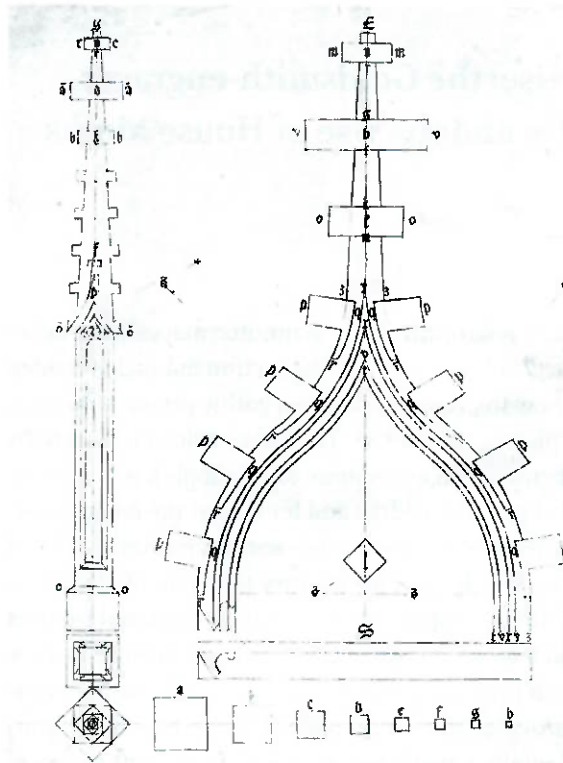


FIGURE 1.1  
Hans Schmuttermayer,  
*Fiallenbuchlein*, fol. 1, 1489

15th century, stimulated by the introduction of the roller press and cheaper paper, gold- and silversmith tools traditionally used for figurative and decorative patterns on metalwork (burin and stylus) were increasingly adopted by craftsmen to produce printed media. Most early engravers shared a family background in the goldsmith's trade. A fellow-goldsmith of Hans Schmuttermayer in Nuremberg, Albrecht Dürer the Elder (c.1427–1502) watched as his son swapped this tradition for the printed image, thereby taking the medium to a hitherto unseen level of quality.<sup>4</sup> It should come as no surprise that, aside to playing cards and devotional prints, one of the most popular genres practiced

4 These goldsmiths were acquainted with one another; they are both named in a 1487 document, stating that a certain Hermann Laisner was in debt to both Hans Schmuttermayer and Albrecht Dürer (the Elder). Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques*, 29. Schmuttermayer may also have influenced Dürer in writing a geometrical treatise in 1525, see: Thomas Eser, "A Different Early Dürer. Three Proposals", in *The Early Dürer*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Daniel Hess and Thomas Eser (New Haven and London: 2012), 25.

by these early goldsmith-engravers were ornament- and design prints.<sup>5</sup> Such prints were essential in disseminating both goldsmith and architectural designs. While models for ornaments and architectural plans had previously circulated among workshops in the form of sketchbooks, workshop designs and luxury presentation drawings, their role was swiftly overtaken by prints.<sup>6</sup> Prints served as patterns not only for goldsmiths but for a wide range of craftsmen and artists, including woodcarvers, architects, book illuminators, painters, and sculptors and they were also prized by early collectors as objects in their own right. Despite the well-established link discussed between goldsmiths' workshops and early print production in print scholarship, the genre of prints depicting goldsmiths' designs has received little attention. This essay will examine the phenomenon of the goldsmith-engraver in the Low Countries and, to a lesser extent, in Germany, between 1470 and 1520, focusing on the use of prints depicting goldsmiths' designs and their role as a medium through which to disseminate technical know-how. The use of monograms and house marks will also be discussed as a manifestation of professional pride and an indicator of the craftsman's awareness of their changing social position within the larger cultural framework of the early Renaissance artist.

## 1 Goldsmith-Engravers in the Low Countries

Little is known about the early developments of printmaking in the Low Countries during the late 15th century, prior to Lucas van Leyden's (1489/94–1533) entrance onto the Netherlandish printmaking stage in around 1510.<sup>7</sup> Many early engravers, such as Master IAM of Zwolle or Master FVB

5 The term *ornament print* covers a vast variety of works ranging from strictly decorative designs (e.g. candelabra decorations, foliage motifs of arabesques) to architectural fantasies and designs for metalwork. In this article, a distinction is made between ornament prints (i.e. prints representing predominantly decorative function patterns) and design prints (i.e. prints representing a design for metalwork, architecture, sculpture, etc.). On the terminology and applications of this specific type of prints, also see: Allison Stielau, "Intent and Independence: Late Fifteenth-Century Object Engravings", in: *Visual Acuity and the Arts of Communication in Early Modern Germany*, ed. Jeffrey Chipps Smith (Farnham: 2014), 21–42.

6 Janet S. Byrne, *Renaissance Ornament Prints and Drawings. The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: 1981), 17–19; For the use of model books in medieval workshops, see: Robert W. Scheller, *Exemplum. Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages* (Amsterdam: 1995).

7 Jan van der Stock, *Printing Images in Antwerp. The Introduction of Printmaking in a City: Fifteenth Century to 1585* (Rotterdam: 1998); Tobias Pfeifer-Helke, editor, *Mit den Gezeiten. Frühe Druckgraphik der Niederlande* (Petersberg: 2013).

(act. 1480–1500), are known only by the initials or monograms with which they signed their prints. The earliest Netherlandish engraver who left a biographical trace is Alart Du Hameel (c.1449–1507). Du Hameel, who trained originally as a master mason, was active on several of the most prestigious building sites in the region of Brabant.<sup>8</sup> When the Brabantine gothic style was reaching its peak, Du Hameel was working as master mason at St John's Cathedral in Den Bosch. Between 1470 and 1490, he designed the south portal and the chapel of the celebrated Confraternity of Our Lady. He was subsequently appointed as building master (*magister operis*) at the church of St Peter in Leuven (1494–95). Like many of his colleagues, Du Hameel's practice exceeded pure architectural design and also involved designing micro-architecture, such as reliquaries, monstrances and other goldsmith's works.<sup>9</sup> As a designer of micro-architecture, Du Hameel may have also designed a sacrament house for the church of Our-Lady in Antwerp, which was to be executed by the sculptor Thomas Best between 1484 and 1487.<sup>10</sup> In 1484, the Cologne goldsmith Hendrik de Borchgrave (1456–1508) was contracted to create a costly new monstrance for the cathedral, following a design of Alart Du Hameel.<sup>11</sup>

Drawings like those mentioned in the contract of 1484 constituted an exclusive dialogue between designer, executor and commissioner. However, Du Hameel was keen on finding a much wider audience for his inventions by translating them into print. Considering his artistic network, it would not be unreasonable to assume that Du Hameel's plates were cut by local goldsmiths for whom the artist had made designs before. Du Hameel's engraving for a *Monstrance* (Fig. 1.2) may be based on the monstrance design he made in 1484 to be followed by Hendrik de Borchgrave. A second ornament print in

- 8 Since the term architect is not fully introduced in the Low Countries before Pieter Coecke van Aelst's translation of Sebastiano Serlio's Fourth Book on Architecture in 1539, the term master mason (*bouwmeester*) is less anachronistic. On the professional development of the architectural profession in the Low Countries, see: Merlijn Hurx, *Architect en Aannemer. De Opkomst van de Bouwmarkt in de Nederlanden 1350–1530* (Nijmegen: 2012), 36–43.
- 9 Oliver Kik, "From Lodge to Studio: Transmissions of Architectural knowledge in the Low Countries 1480–1530", in *The Notion of Painter-Architect in Italy and the Southern Low Countries*, edited by Piet Lombaerde (*Architectura Moderna*) 11 (Turnhout: 2014), 73–88.
- 10 KAA, Kercrekeningen X (1493–1494), fol. 36r–37r. Fernand Donnet, *Notice Historique sur la Chapelle du T. S. Sacrement en l'Église Cathédrale d'Anvers* (Antwerp: 1924). Donnet does not mention a specific archival reference for this finding and the payment is not recorded in the church accounts. Du Hameel is only mentioned in an advisory role for the construction of the north tower by master mason Domien de Wagemakere.
- 11 Christian Verreyt, "Allart du Hamel of du Hameel", *Oud Holland*, 12 (1894) 1–8; Liesbeth Helmus, "Drie contracten met Zilversmeden", in: *In Buscoducis. Kunst uit de Bourgondische tijd te 's-Hertogenbosch*, ed. A. M. Koldeweij (Maarsse: 1990), 473–81.



FIGURE 1.2  
Alart Du Hameel, *Monstrance*,  
c.1484–85, engraving

which the master mason demonstrated his abilities to incorporate the latest novelties in gothic style represents a *Gothic Baldachin* (Fig. 1.3). The concept for this print was vaguely based on the sacrament house in the choir of St Peter's at Leuven, designed and sculpted by the Leuven master mason Matheus de Layens (c.1430–83) in 1457. With its hexagonal shape, seemingly endless stacking of flying buttresses, pinnacles, and gilded leaf work, the sacrament house marked a new stage in the aesthetics of Brabantine gothic design. The intended audience for the print was most likely Du Hameel's fellow craftsmen with a shared interest in constructive geometry, which was so essential for the design of objects of an architectural nature: goldsmiths, engravers, painters, master masons, woodcarvers, ornamental sculptors, etc. The clearest indication of this intended audience for the print is the partially represented geometrical ground plan, present in both of Du Hameel's engravings, which allowed craftsmen to "read" the elevation as a representation of a three-dimensional object. This "*ad-quadratum*" representation method had a long tradition among architectural designers dating back to at least the 13th century.<sup>12</sup> Most gothic architectural drawings began with the construction of a geometrical ground plan, from which the elevation was later deduced. Sometimes, like in Du Hameel's *Gothic Baldachin*, the ground plan is only partially shown, indicated by the fraction one-eighth.<sup>13</sup>

It was not only master masons like Du Hameel who applied this constructive geometry; it was also essential to goldsmiths' design. This is demonstrated in the work of Master W with the Key (or Master WA) (*act.* 1470–90), named after his signature of a W with an A-shaped house mark, which in the 19th century was interpreted as a key.<sup>14</sup> Given that one of his prints depicts the heraldry of Charles the Bold (1433–77), we can assume he was a goldsmith active within the entourage of the Burgundian court. Two other series also point toward Burgundian patronage: one represents an almost encyclopedic typology of the Burgundian naval fleet, while a second series displays a Burgundian encampment with cavalry and infantry troops. Although Master WA has previously been identified as the Bruges goldsmith Willem van der Cruse, there is

12 Johann Josef Böker, *Architektur der Gotik/Gothic Architecture: Bestandskatalog der weltgrößten Sammlung an gotischen Baurissen im Kupferstichkabinett der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien* (Munich: 2005); Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques*, 32; Robert Bork, *Geometry of Creation* (Farnham: 2011).

13 For a reconstruction of the ground plan, see: Krista De Jonge, "'Scientie' and 'Experientie' dans le Gothique Moderne des Anciens Pays-Bas", in: *Le Gothique de la Renaissance*, edited by Monique Chatenet (Paris: 2010), 215.

14 Lehrs, 1895, *Der Meister WA: ein Kupferstecher der Zeit Karls des Kühnen* (Dresden: 1895); Wolfgang Boerner, *Der Meister WA* (Leipzig: 1929).



FIGURE 1.3  
Alart Du Hameel, *Gothic Baldachin*,  
c.1478–1507, engraving



little more than the cross shape in his house mark to confirm this tentative suggestion.<sup>15</sup> The majority of his output consists of designs for goldsmiths, architects, woodcarvers, cabinetmakers and painters.<sup>16</sup> His prints reveal various applications of geometrical design, ranging from monstrosities, and challenges, to architectural elements.

A comparative analysis of different impressions of the same print reveals that many of Master WA's printed designs were combined with geometrical ground plans. Often this element was subsequently cut off by later owners or collectors who were either unappreciative or ignorant of the relationship between the geometrical plan and the elevation. Further technical information is provided in Master WA's engraving depicting a *Flying Buttress* (Fig. 1.4). The piers, pinnacles and buttresses of the structure are all shown in an orthogonal elevation, with one exception: at the left side of the engraving, where the buttress seems to have been cut off, and instead the engraver chooses to show a cross-section. This allows the ground plan to be deduced by the geometrically schooled viewer. Template drawings of this kind were often used in gothic architectural design practice and were referred to as *berderen* in building contracts.<sup>17</sup> They were mostly made from wood or paper and were used by stonemasons during the building process. Templates like these can be seen in the background of an architect's portrait by Ludger Tom Ring the Elder (1496–1547) (Fig. 1.5).

Very early on, the design prints of Master W with the Key were copied extensively by Israel Van Meckenem (c.1455–1503), which indicates the growing demand for such models within the nascent print market. In the introduction of his *Fialenbüchlein*, Schmuttermayer explains he is writing his manual "for the instruction of our fellow men and all the masters and journeymen who use this high and noble art of geometry".<sup>18</sup> A similar audience to that discussed in relation to Du Hameel, of fellow craftsmen and practitioners of geometry, was intended for many of Master WA's printed designs. design prints; here discussed. The large size of some of the prints, however, might also suggest

- 15 André Wegener Sleeswyk, "De Graveur WA: een speurtocht", *Gens Nostra*, 49 (1994), 1–14.  
 16 Recently one of Master W with the Key's ornament prints was identified as the source for a painted mantle clasp on a panel by Gerard David, underlining the versatility of these design prints, see: Constanza Beltrami, "A print Source for a Painting by Gerard David", *The Burlington Magazine* 162, no. 1410 (2020), 748–755.  
 17 Hurx, *Architect en Aannemer* (see n. 9), 274–78.  
 18 "zutrost vñ vntterweysung vnserm nachsten vñ allē maisteren vñ gesellen die sich diser hohen vñ freyen kunst der Geometria geprauchten ir gemute speculirung vnd ymaginacion", Lon Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques*, 84.

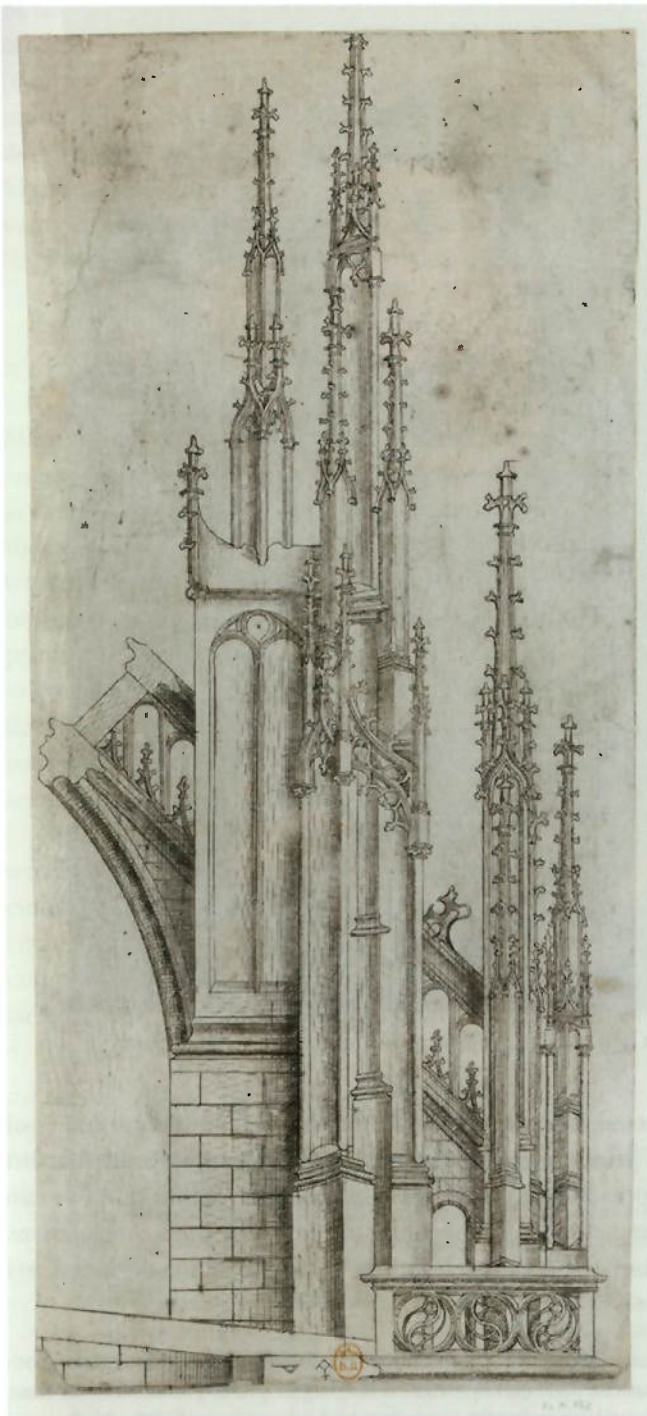


FIGURE 1.4 Master WA, *Flying Buttress*, c.1470–80, engraving



FIGURE 1.5 Ludger Tom Ring the Elder, *Portrait of an Architect*, c.1520, oil on panel

that they were collected as luxury objects.<sup>19</sup> Although there are no traces of early Netherlandish print collections or even workshop inventories that list prints among their possessions, an idea of their use for such a purpose can be obtained by looking at the later inventory of the *Basler Goldschmiederrisse*. This collection, part of the Amerbach-Kabinett in Basel since 1578, consists

19 Du Hameel's *Monstrance* engraving, for example, consists of three separate plates, with a total height of 111 cm. This makes it one of the largest prints produced in its time. Designing, printing and mounting the image required some time and skill, which would have raised its market value and price considerably.

of the entire workshop stock of 709 prints and drawings and 773 goldsmith models once belonging to the Basel goldsmith Jörg Schweiger the Elder (c.1470–1533) and his son Jörg Schweiger the Younger (d. 1574).<sup>20</sup> It provides a unique insight into the portfolio of a goldsmith's workshop and includes many design prints of German goldsmith-engravers, such as Urs Graf (1485–1528), Martin Schongauer (1445–1491), Jörg Syrlin the Younger (1455–1521), and Israel van Meckenem. Furthermore, the collection includes a print by Master W with the Key, which represents the wooden case of a carved altarpiece.<sup>21</sup>

## 2 The Social Position of the Early Modern Goldsmith and Architect

Many goldsmiths in the Upper-Rhine area and the Low Countries made the engraving of copper plates for prints their main occupation or embraced this professional activity completely. This phenomenon had severe implications to the social standing of the artist, and also coincided with a flowering of humanist writings pertaining to the artistic identity of early modern craftsmen. To understand the full implications of this professional shift, from goldsmith to printmaker and in some cases painter, on the social ladder, it is first important to consider the social position of goldsmiths during the 15th-century. Both in the Upper-Rhine area and in the Burgundian Netherlands, the goldsmiths' profession was much appreciated for several reasons, and these artists were often among the wealthiest and most privileged of their time.<sup>22</sup>

One reason for this was the high status of patrons for goldsmiths' works which reflected onto the goldsmiths themselves. Ownership of gems, and precious metals was far beyond the means of the majority of the population and could only be afforded by the Court and the Church. Hugo van der Velde has compared the incomes and revenues of Gerard Loyet (fl. 1466–1502), goldsmith at the court of Charles the Bold with those of contemporary painters

<sup>20</sup> Paul Tanner, *Das Amerbach-Kabinett. Die Basler Goldschmiedekerse* (Basel: 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog*, vol. 7, no. 88.59.11; Tanner, *Amerbach*, 89, no. 64. Although prints by Master W with the Key can also be found in other early modern collections, such as that of Hartmann Schedel and Ferdinand Columbus, they included no ornament prints. On these collections, see: Peter Fuhring, "Colligete fragmenta, ne pereant": The Ornament Prints in the Columbus Collection" in: *The Print Collection of Ferdinand Columbus 1488–1539: A Renaissance Collector in Seville*, ed. Mark P. McDonald (London: 2004), 206–220; Béatrice Hernad (ed.), *Die Graphiksammlung des Humanisten Hartmann Schedel* (Munich: 1990), 35.

<sup>22</sup> On the social position of the goldsmith in the Upper-Rhine area, see: Thomas Eser, "Der Gold- und Silberschmied. Edelmetall- und edelsteinverarbeitende Gewerbe", in *Handwerk im Mittelalter*, ed. Christine Sauer (Darmstadt: 2012), 43–55.

working in Flanders.<sup>23</sup> In 1467, Loyet received a payment of 1200 pounds for a golden statuette, which was presented as a votive gift from Charles the Bold to Liège Cathedral. By comparison, Hugo van der Goes received just 360 pounds for the completion of two Justice panels and a *Last Judgement*, commissioned by the city of Leuven in 1473.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, a large proportion of this cost difference is due to the intrinsic value of the materials. However, goldsmiths' work was also highly valued because it fulfilled an important role in state ceremony. In the Burgundian 'theatre state', goldwork, with its sheer splendor and magnificence, was an essential means to manifest the power and eloquence of the court.<sup>25</sup> Gold and silver dominate the inventories of the Burgundian treasury and goldwork was the favored gift *par excellence* in diplomatic meetings, where golden goblets or statuettes were frequently exchanged.<sup>26</sup> In the context of ecclesiastical commissions, goldwork and jewelry offered ultimate praise of the Lord, their intricate design and divine glitter could simply not be achieved in painting. The high value of the materials they worked with added to the goldsmith's social standing. Additionally, they were often Masters of the Mint, and thus had the right or privilege to cast new coins.<sup>27</sup> Both the income and prestige they gained from this activity was often considerable. Goldsmiths also took on the additional role of money changer, a profession that by the early 16th century had become infamous for its wealth.<sup>28</sup>

Goldsmiths, along with architectural designers, had a profound knowledge of (Euclidian) geometry. Whether it was a chalice, monstrance or church spire, its design required basic geometrical principles to calculate proportions, dimensions and stability. Since geometry was one of the seven Liberal Arts, it was regarded with higher esteem than other artistic activities, such as painting and sculpture, which were only considered minor mechanical arts.<sup>29</sup>

23 Hugo Van der Velden, *The Donor's Image. Gerard Loyet and the Votive Portraits of Charles the Bold* (Turnhout: 2000), 65–67.

24 Van der Velden, *The Donor's Image*.

25 For the term "Burgundian theatre state", see Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries under Burgundian Rule 1369–1530* (Pennsylvania: 1999).

26 Marina Belozerskaya, *Rethinking the Renaissance. Burgundian Arts Across Europe* (New York: 2002), 84–104; Marina Belozeskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: 2005), 64–70.

27 Godelieve Van Hemeldonck (ed.), *Zilver uit de Gouden Eeuw van Antwerpen* (Antwerp: 1988), 30.

28 Raymond de Roover, *Money, Banking and Credit in Medieval Bruges* (Cambridge MA 1948), 171–344.

29 On the origins of the divisions between technical and mechanical arts, see: Pamela O. Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship. Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Baltimore and London: 2001).

Although *Metallaria* (blacksmithing and metallurgy) was traditionally considered a mechanical art, the closer association of goldsmiths with the liberal art of *Geometria* lifted it to the level of a Liberal Art. It is precisely this geometrical knowledge that had such a tremendous impact on the social standing and self-image of other professions such as engravers or painters which is so-often associated with the emergence of the 'Renaissance' artist.

This privileged social position enjoyed by goldsmiths in 15th-century urban society is strongly reflected in the portraiture of the time. The earliest example in early Netherlandish painting is Jan van Eyck's 1436 *Portrait of Jan de Leeuw*.<sup>30</sup> The prominent Bruges goldsmith proudly displays his craftsmanship by presenting a golden ring to the viewer. Additionally, the picture's frame alludes to his craft, as Van Eyck expertly replicates in paint the goldsmith's incisions on a brass frame, which states the sitter's name, age and profession. The fact that Jan de Leeuw could commission his portrait from the official court painter of Duke Phillip the Good (1419–1467), delivers a clear message about the sitter's status. Much in the same tradition is Petrus Christus's (c.1410–1473) *Portrait of a Goldsmith in his Shop*—convincingly identified by Hugo van der Velden as the successful Bruges goldsmith Willem van Vlueten (*act.* 1432–62). He is portrayed in his workshop as he receives a visiting group of noblemen (Fig. 1.6).<sup>31</sup> With its elaborate display of jewelry, gems and precious metals, the portrait offers a clear impression of the wealth and social standing of the goldsmith. In these portraits, Van Eyck and Petrus Christus established a long tradition of professional goldsmith portraits that continued well into the 16th century.<sup>32</sup> At a time when only the uppermost elements of urban society and the Burgundian nobility were financially capable and socially permitted to be portrayed by the most celebrated painters of their time, goldsmiths were among the few craftsmen able to count themselves among this select group.

The self-representation of architects presents a comparable image of high professional esteem and self-confidence. Especially in Germany and Bohemia it was not uncommon for master masons to finish a commission by including a self-portrait within the architectural framework that they had designed (churches, pulpits, choir stalls, rood screens, etc.). One of the earliest and best-known examples of this is the sculpted self-portrait that the influential master mason Peter Parler (1330–99) included in the choir triforium of Prague's

30 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. 946.

31 Metropolitan Museum of Arts, Robert Lehman Collection, inv. 1975.1.110. Hugo van der Velden, "Defrocking St Eloy: Petrus Christus's Vocational portrait of a goldsmith", *Simiolus*, 26 (1998), 243–61.

32 On goldsmiths' portraits in the Low Countries see: Van der Velden, *Defrocking St Eloy*, 261–269; Silver, "Massys and Money: The Tax Collectors Rediscovered", *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, 7, no. 2 (2015), 6–7.



FIGURE 1.6 Petrus Christus, *A Goldsmith in his Shop*, 1449, oil on panel

St Vitus Cathedral, thus putting himself on par with the similar portraits of his ecclesiastical and royal commissioners. Much in the same tradition is the self-portrait of the Nuremberg sculptor Adam Kraft (*d.* 1508), in the Sacrament House (1493–96) of the St Lorenz church.<sup>33</sup> In a place traditionally reserved for saints or apostles, the micro-architectural structure is carried on the shoulders

33 Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London: 1980), 288.

of two masons on both sides, with Kraft's self-portrait impertinently placed in the middle, at a scale close to life-size (Fig. 1.7).<sup>34</sup> Proudly dressed in the clothes of his trade, he portrays himself holding his tools of creation: the mallet and chisel. A final example is that of Anton Pilgram (c.1460–1514/16), the sculptor and master mason of the building lodge of Vienna's St Stephan's Cathedral, who incorporated two self-portraits into the micro-architecture. Once, he peers out of an illusionistic window, at the bottom of the pulpit with a compass in his hands.<sup>35</sup> He appears a second time in an even bolder manner at the base of the organ loft (c.1510–15), built into the cathedral's north wall (Fig. 1.8). Even more than Parler or Kraft, Pilgram makes an unequivocal statement about both his reputation and his geometrical knowledge. Instead of holding tools of manual labour as Kraft does, Pilgram holds a compass and a T-square: instruments of the intellectual designing process at the drawing table. It is also no coincidence that both times his head is placed below complex geometrical structures; appearing at the base of a convoluted series of intersecting squares and topped by the vaults.<sup>36</sup> The entire structure is a showcase of the most intricate gothic geometry of its time, which literally seems to sprout and blossom from the architect's mind. Directly below the sculptor's polychrome self-portrait, he has placed his mason's mark, so that there can be no doubt whatsoever about his identity.

Ever since Jacob Burckhardt "re-invented" the Renaissance, the phenomenon of self-portraiture by painters has been considered as one of the key elements in the growing self-awareness and rising social status of the Renaissance artist.<sup>37</sup> In light of the present analysis of the goldsmith-engraver, it should come as little surprise that one of the most referenced instances of self-portraiture in northern European painting stems from the son of a goldsmith.<sup>38</sup> At the age of thirteen, in 1486, the young Dürer started a life-long practice

34 Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford: 2008), 149; Achim Timmermann, *Real Presence: Sacrament Houses and the Body of Christ, c.1270–1600* (Architectura Medii Aevi 4) (Turnhout: 2009), 144–52; Ethan Matt Kavaler, *Renaissance Gothic* (New Haven and London: 2012), 173.

35 Pilgrim was most likely inspired by a similar sculptor's self-portrait at the base of the pulpit in Strasbourg Cathedral, designed by Hans Hammer (c.1440/5–1519) in 1484.

36 Kavaler, *Renaissance Gothic*, 175.

37 Frances Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (New Haven and London: 2000), 209–242.

38 It should be noted that one of the earliest known instance of self-portraiture in Italian art is that of the sculptor and goldsmith Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) in the inclusion of his own likeness in the framing border of the 'Gates of Paradise' that he made for the Baptistery in Florence between 1447–48.





FIGURE 1.7 Adam Kraft, *Sacrament House* (detail), 1493–96, Nuremberg, St Lorenz



FIGURE 1.8 Anton Pilgram, *Organ Loft*, 1510–15, Vienna, St Stephan

of self-portraiture. It was already in line with family tradition, however, as Dürer's father had also drawn his self-portrait in a meticulous silverpoint proudly portraying himself, holding a delicate golden statuette in his hand as a sign of his craft and skill (Fig. 1.9).<sup>39</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner writes: "If this

39 Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, inv. 4846.



FIGURE 1.9 Albert Dürer the Elder, *Self-Portrait*, 1486, silverpoint on prepared paper



FIGURE 1.10  
Israel van Meckenem,  
*Self-portrait with his wife*,  
c.1490, engraving

is the self-portrait of Dürer the Elder (...), self-portraiture does not emerge in Germany single-handedly in the art of Dürer the Younger, but rather is a practice shared by a Nuremberg goldsmith and his son".<sup>40</sup>

Rather than simply being a trope in the Dürer family, though, we have seen that the practice of self-portraiture stems from a longer tradition in the goldsmith's trade. Dürer the Elder's drawing recalls earlier portraits of goldsmiths by Van Eyck, Petrus Christus and Gerard David. In fact, in his 1524 family chronicle, Dürer writes about his father that he "spent a long time in the Netherlands learning from the great masters of his craft, and finally came to Nuremberg in the year 1455".<sup>41</sup> If Dürer the Elder went to the Netherlands in the middle of the 15th century, the best place to meet the great masters of his craft would have been Ghent or Bruges. It was perhaps here that he picked up the tradition of the goldsmith portrait. Goldsmith portraits seemed to have been customary in Germany as well, as is suggested from an engraving, dated between 1480 and 1490, by Israel van Meckenem, in which he is portrayed with his wife Ida (Fig. 1.10).<sup>42</sup> The unusual print shows a close-up of both sitter's heads against a floral backdrop and the lettering below "*figuratio facterum Israelis et Ida suis uxoris IVM*" (depicted are the faces of Israel and his wife Ida). The Latin inscription on the fictive frame, calls to mind the Dutch inscription included on the frame of Jan van Eyck's portrait of Jan de Leeuw. Van Meckenem's portrait

40 Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: 1993), 43.

41 Jeffrey Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer. Documentary Biography* (New Haven and London: 2017), vol. 1, 31.

42 Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog*, vol. 9, 1; Landau and Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 57.

should likewise be considered a statement of a goldsmith's self-fashioning, declared through the medium of print. A second print by Van Meckenem confirms this professional self-importance. Depicting a bearded man wearing an oriental turban, the print proudly states "*Israel van Meckenem Goldschmied*" ("Israhe! van Meckenem, Goldsmith"), serving as a professional calling card of his skill.<sup>43</sup> The enormity of Van Meckenem's print output, including many design prints, might lead one to suspect that engraving had become his main professional activity, yet the goldsmith-engraver was still inclined to stress his abilities as a goldsmith.<sup>44</sup>

### 3 Leaving Their Mark

Further analysis of goldsmith-engravers' signatures reveals how long-standing craft traditions were transferred into the new medium of printed images. Notwithstanding some notable exceptions like Jan van Eyck and Colyn de Coter (*act.* 1480–1525), signing or monogramming works of art was a practice mostly employed by master masons, sculptors, silver- and goldsmiths and cabinet-makers.<sup>45</sup> Before Albrecht Dürer trademarked his print production with his famous AD-monogram, a whole generation of goldsmiths, sculptors and architectural designers had used their monograms and family house marks both as self-promotional tools of expertise and as quality control. Martin Schongauer signed all his 115 prints known to us today with his initials "M S", separated by a cross.<sup>46</sup> Although the initials are a reference to the engraver's name, the cross in the centre seems to be a family house mark, since his brother, the goldsmith-engraver Ludwig Schongauer (*c.*1450–1494), used the very same cross between his initials on his prints. Similarly, Alart Du Hameel's prints are signed with his surname, followed by his house mark. On some occasions, the word *Bosche* is added to Du Hameel's prints, as a reference to the city where he worked in between 1478 and 1494.<sup>47</sup> This recalls the standard signing practice used by silver- and goldsmiths in many Netherlandish cities. The product was

43 Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog*, vol. 9, 5.

44 Zelen, *Zum Verhältnis*, 30; Landau and Parshall, *The Renaissance Print* 56–63.

45 Tobias Burg, *Die Signatur. Formen und Funktionen vom Mittelalter bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster: 2007). On the use of signatures in the Low Countries, see: Ruben Suykerbuyck, *Sign of Times. A Concise History of the Signature in Netherlandish painting 1432–1575* (Unpublished MA Thesis; Utrecht: 2013).

46 Tobias Burg, "Signaturen in der frühen Drückgraphik" in *Künstlersignaturen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Nicole Hegener (Petersberg: 2013), 284–85.

47 This is analogous to Hieronymus Bosch's signing practice, whose surname was Van Aken.

signed with the mark of the individual master (an initial or a house-mark) and the city mark.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes a third mark was added by the guild as an extra quality check of the alloy. On Du Hameel's *Monstrance*, his largest and most luxurious print, he exceptionally signed it with his first name in gothic lettering, followed by his house mark. At the base of the monstrance, the city's name S' HERTOGEN BOSCH is mentioned in full, rather than just the more commonly abbreviated form "Bosche". As Marisa Bass has recently noted, Du Hameel's self-representation in this print goes even further.<sup>49</sup> Curling around the base of the engraved object is a banderol proclaiming Du Hameel's personal motto: "*non desino*" (I do not cease). Although the writing style for the city and his own name sometimes differs from print to print, the one thing that appears on all of Du Hameel's known prints is the idiosyncratic house mark. On prints from a highly-reputed master builder, the use of a house mark was a transferable sign of professional pride and geometrical skill as a designer, much in the same way as the anonymous Master W with the Key used his monogram. Most likely Master WA was a Netherlandish goldsmith, sculptor or mason whose name started with a W, which was then followed by his personal house mark.

The practice of using house marks as a sign of social standing and technical expertise was not only transferred to engraving, but also to painting. Very similar to the career path taken by Albrecht Dürer, is that of the renowned Antwerp painter, Quinten Metsys (1466–1530) who was the son of the Leuven blacksmith, Joos Metsys the Elder (*d.* 1482). Quinten's eldest brother, also called Joos (*act.* 1481–1529), was master mason of the prestigious new church of St Peter in Leuven, and as such, he was responsible for the delivery of the new design plans for the church's west facade.<sup>50</sup> In 1491, Quinten Metsys is first mentioned as a painter in the records of the Antwerp Guild of St Luke, without any record of his having served an apprenticeship with an Antwerp painter.<sup>51</sup> Little is known about the period between his being mentioned in the guild records and his

48 In Antwerp, for example, this was customary since 1382. Van Hemeldonck, ed., *Zilver*, 26–27. Silver- and goldsmiths in Den Bosch did not have an individual guild until 1503. Here as well, it was stipulated that every object should bare a master's mark, a year mark and a city mark, see: A. M. Koldewey, "Goud- en zilversmeden te 's-Hertogenbosch" in: *In Buscoducis. Kunst uit de Bourgondische tijd te 's-Hertogenbosch* ed. A. M. Koldewey (Maarsse: 1990), 464–481, 608–9.

49 Marisa Bass, "Hieronymus Bosch and his Legacy as 'Inventor'", in *Beyond Bosch. The Afterlife of a Renaissance Master in Print*, eds. Marisa Bass and Elizabeth Wyckoff (Saint Louis: 2015), 20–24.

50 Kik, *From Lodge to Studio*, 82–84.

51 Philippe Félix Rombouts and Théodore Van Leries, *De Liggeren en andere historische archieven van het Antwerpse Sint-Lukasgilde*, vol. 1 (Antwerp: 1864–76), 43.



FIGURE 1.11  
 Quinten Metsys, *St Anne*  
 triptych (detail), 1508–09,  
 oil on panel

first dated altarpiece in 1509, *The St Anne Altarpiece*, already a mature work.<sup>52</sup> The painting was commissioned by the Fraternity of St Anne for the same church in Leuven for which his brother was designing the architectural plans. In the outer left wing, an inscription reads: *QUINTE METSYS SCREEF DIT 1509* (*Quinten Metsys wrote this*) (Fig. 1.11). Often omitted in the literature is the hour glass-shaped masons' mark placed before the year.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps intentionally, the signature is also placed upon an architectural element, which is right above a window looking out on what seems to be a hypothetical version of the north tower of Antwerp's church of Our-Lady.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the son of a goldsmith and the brother of a master mason signs his work with a house mark should leave no doubt about the message the artist thought to communicate: besides being a good painter, he wanted to state his ample experience in geometry and its applications. In fact, Metsys never fully left the goldsmith trade, since he

52 Brussels, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten van België, inv. 2784. Andrée De Bosque, *Quinten Metsys* (Brussels: 1975), 92–100; Larry Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys with Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: 1984), 35–45, 199–204; Raoul Slachmuylders, "De Triptiek van de Maagdschap van de Heilige Anna", *Quinten Metsys en Leuven* (Arca Lovanensis artes atque historiae restans documenta) 33 (Leuven: 2007), 85–120.

53 De Bosque interprets the sign as "Anno". See: De Bosque, *Quinten Metsys*, 99. However, in an anonymous copy of Metsys's *Money Changers*, in Brussels, the same mason's mark appears on a slip of paper sticking out of a book. Brussels, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten van België, inv. 7356. It may be possible that this copy was made after another version from Metsys' workshop which also included the house mark. The oeuvre of Marinus van Reymerswaele shows adequately that there was a market for this new secular genre piece. Several versions would not have been uncommon for Metsys' workshop practice which did not shy away from making several versions for the developing Antwerp art market.

54 Although the Antwerp tower was only completed in 1521, Joos Metsys was in close contact with both Rombout II Keldermans and Domien de Waghmakere, the architects responsible for the tower's design; see: Kik, *From Lodge to Studio*, 84.

remained active as a designer of portrait medallions.<sup>55</sup> In 1491, the same year as his registration in the Antwerp painters' guild, Metsys cast a bronze medallion with the portrait of his sister-in-law Cristina Metsys (*d.* 1518).<sup>56</sup> In 1519, when he had already established himself and enjoyed a long and successful career as a painter, Metsys cast a bronze medallion with the likeness of Erasmus (c.1466–1536).<sup>57</sup> Erasmus shared copies of the medallion with his humanist circle and carried on an extensive correspondence about it with Dürer's patron Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530).<sup>58</sup> Given his experience as a draftsman and a goldsmith, one can only wonder why no prints of Quinten Metsys are known today, or at least none bearing his house mark.<sup>59</sup> Similar to Metsys's career path is that of the Bruges painter Lanceloot Blondeel (1498–1561).<sup>60</sup> In 1519, he started a successful career as a painter when he was inscribed as a master painter in the Bruges guild of St Luke. Before 1519, however, he was already active as a mason, as one learns from the eulogizing poem written in the year of his death by the Bruges poet Eduard de Dene (1505–76):

Here lays buried the body of Lanceloot Blondeel / First he was at work  
as a mason and a great artist with the mason's trowel / after which he  
became a painter / following Apelles's brush in painting / thus complet-  
ing himself in Architecture.<sup>61</sup>

Describing Blondeel as an artist (*Constenare*) with his trowel, seems most likely in this context to refer to his experience in the Liberal Art of geometry.<sup>62</sup> Blondeel himself took great pride in his background as a mason, as he consistently signed his work with a monogram of his initials LAB in combination with a

55 Victor Tourneur, "Quintin Metsys, Médailleur", *Revue Belge de Numismatique*, 72 (1920), 139–160; Luc Smolderen, "Quintin Metsys Médailleur d'Erasmus", *Scrinium Erasmianum*, ed. Joseph Coppens (Brussels: 1969), vol. 1, 513–525; De Bosque, *Quinten Metsys*, 59–70.

56 Antwerp, Museum Mayer Van den Bergh, inv. 2353.

57 Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, inv. 21.

58 De Bosque, *Quinten Metsys*, 59–61.

59 His son, Cornelis Metsys (1510–1556), would enjoy a career as an engraver, see: Jan van der Stock, *Cornelis Metsys. Grafisch Werk* (Brussels: 1985).

60 Eva Tahon, *Lanceloot Blondeel* (Bruges: 1988).

61 'Hier licht. vleysch begraven van Landslood blondeel voormaels werckman gheveist / met maetsers truweel groot constenare / schilder gheworden der naer Reyn naervolgher in pictura Apelles pincheel vvetenlick inde Architecture gheheef. Walter Waterschoot and Dirk Coigneau, "Eduard de Dene, Testament Rhetoricael", *Jaarboek Koninklijke soevereine hoofdkamer van rhetorica De Fonteyne te Gent 2* (1976–77), 22.

62 On the shifting meaning of the word artist, see: Krista De Jonge, "The Court Architect as Artist in the Southern Low Countries", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 59* (Zwolle: 2010), 111–35.

picture of a trowel. The list of late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century engravers or painters who share a family or personal background as architects or goldsmiths is extensive.<sup>63</sup> Arguably it is even possible to speak of a professional pattern. These craftsmen's backgrounds were not regarded as shameful. Instead, artists signing with their monograms, house marks and even working tools advertised their ability to design complex geometrical structures, which made them professional artists in the literal sense of the word, as practitioners of the *Liberal Arts*.

#### 4 Epilogue

Over the course of the 16th century, this appreciation for technical and geometrical backgrounds would change and a reversal of values governing the hierarchy of the arts would gradually take place. Under the growing influence of Italian art theory, the role of painting would become more prominent and the 'art' of the goldsmith would come to be dismissively regarded as manual labour. In fact, Albrecht Dürer would be one of the first to regard painting as a Liberal Art, elevated by the appropriation of geometrical science, as he states in one of the prefaces to his treatise on human proportions.<sup>64</sup> In his family chronicle of 1523, Dürer tells the often-quoted story of how his father took him out of school to teach him the goldsmith's craft: "And by the time I could do competent work, I felt myself more drawn towards painting than to goldsmith's work. I put this to my father, but he was not pleased, because he rued the time I had wasted learning to be a goldsmith".<sup>65</sup> By the time he rewrote his own history, Dürer had already stayed in Venice and met Jacopo de'Barbari (1460–1516) and probably Luca Pacioli (c.1447–1517), which radically altered his art theoretical views.<sup>66</sup> It is from this period forward he was hailed as the Northern or German Apelles. By distancing himself from his goldsmith background, Dürer forged a dichotomy of intellectual liberal art versus manual labour in favour of painting. The same debate took place in the Low Countries around the middle of

63 For the Low Countries alone, this list would include Jan Gossart, Lanceloot Blondeel, Quinten Metsys, Jan Rombouts, Frans and Cornelis Floris, Cornelis Cort and Gillis II Coignet.

64 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer*, vol. 2, 710.

65 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer*, vol. 1, 35.

66 Ulrich Pfisterer, "Dürer in Discourse: Art Theories around 1500 and the Paths They Took North and South of the Alps", *Albrecht Dürer. His Art in Context* ed. Jochen Sander (Munich, London and New York: 2013), 376–82.



the 16th century.<sup>67</sup> Decisive in the changing attitude towards painting was the Liège humanist milieu around the painter Lambert Lombard (c.1505–1566).<sup>68</sup> Lombard's art theoretical thinking was strongly influenced by his Italian travels (1537–38) and more importantly by Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), with whom he corresponded in 1565 about art.<sup>69</sup> Vasari's triad of *Disegno* (painting, sculpture and architecture) had no place for goldsmith's work and would change our view of how art is perceived. Lombard's Vasarian perspective strongly influenced the following generation of artists, among whom were his pupils Frans Floris (1517–70), Willem Key (c.1515–68) and Hendrik Golzius (1558–1617). He also taught the Bruges humanist and amateur painter Domenicus Lampsonius (1532–99).

Among the first contributions to Northern art history is Lampsonius' *Pictorum Aliquot Celebrium Germaniae Inferioris Effigies* of 1572, a collection of twenty-three laudatory poems on Netherlandish painters, each accompanied by portrait engravings published by Hieronymus Cock.<sup>70</sup> Particularly relevant to our present discussion of the goldsmith-engraver is the poem and engraving dedicated to Quinten Metsys. Lampsonius tells us how Metsys was "a rough Cyclop Blacksmith before, but through love he was able to leave the blows of the anvil for the pleasing strokes of the paint brush".<sup>71</sup> Lampsonius clearly regarded his background as son of a blacksmith as a major obstacle in his path to becoming a painter. Influenced by Vasari's endeavors to add painting

67 Zirka Zaremba Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp 1550–1700* (Princeton: 1987); Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (Chicago: 1991); Hessel Miedema, "De ontwikkeling van de kunsttheorie in de Hollandse Gouden Eeuw 1: Het Begin; de Zuidelijke Nederlanden", *Oud Holland*, vol. 125 (2012), 102–15.

68 Godelieve Denhaene, *Lambert Lombard. De Renaissance en humanisme te Luik* (Antwerp: 1990); Edward H. Wouk, "Reclaiming the Antiquities of Gaul: Lambert Lombard and the History of Northern Art", *Simiolus*, 36 (2012), 35–65.

69 Gianni Carlo Scolia and Caterina Volpi, *Da van Eyck a Brueghel. Scritti sulle arti di Domenico Lamsonio* (Turin: 2001), 34–40.

70 Melion, *Netherlandish Canon*, 143–59.

71 The full text reads: "Before I used to be a Cyclopean smith, but when a wooing painter began to love on an equal footing with me, and the cautious girl objected to me that she liked the heavy thundering of hammers less than the silent paintbrush, love made me a painter. A tiny hammer, which is the sure note of my paintings, alludes to this. Thus, when Venus had asked Vulcan for arms for her son, you, greatest of poets, made a painter out of a smith." ("*Ante faber fueram Cyclopeus; ast ubi mecum / Ex aequo pictor coepit amarsi / Procus / Seque graves tudium tonitrus postferre silent / Peniculo obiecit cauta puella mihi / Pictorem me fecit amor. tudes innuit illud / Exiguus, tabulis quae nota certa meis / Sic ubi Vulcanum nato Venus arma rogarat / Pictorem e fabro summe Poeta facis*"). Domenicus Lampsonius, *Pictorum Aliquot Celebrium Germaniae inferioris effigies* (Antwerp: 1572), fol. 9.

to the canon of liberal arts, Lamponius presents Metsys' career change as the evolution of a mere craftsman into that of a learned artist, ignoring the high status bestowed upon the goldsmith profession and geometrical designers at the time.

The fact that geometrical professions increasingly became involved in print design had serious repercussions. Not only did their designs find a larger market, inspiring fellow craftsmen, it initiated an evolution in the role geometry could play in the visual arts. Architect-engravers like Alart du Hameel or goldsmith-engravers such as Master WA represent a social pattern that was instrumental in the dissemination of technical knowledge among different professional groups that were often separated by guild regulations. This scientific knowledge was demonstrated and promoted by the use of house marks and professional tools in early signatures. For this new generation of engravers and painters, their geometrical know-how added an intellectual and economic value to their mark and burin, with a wide range of applications, for example architectural design, linear perspective and even cartography. The professional shift would also influence the dissemination of attitudes towards art and the self-image of the craftsman as an artist.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Setting these developments in a wider European context, it does not happen to have been a coincidence that the development of geometrical linear perspective in Italy was conceived by artists whose family backgrounds were rooted in geometrically oriented professions. For example, Brunelleschi was the son of a goldsmith and Andrea Mantegna the son of a carpenter. See: Howard Burns, "The Painter-Architect in Italy during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento", in *The Notion of Painter-Architect*, 1–8.

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